



WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A GIRL: MY GIRLS, OUR MOMENTS, OUR MEMORIES

Mesa, Arizona EDITION

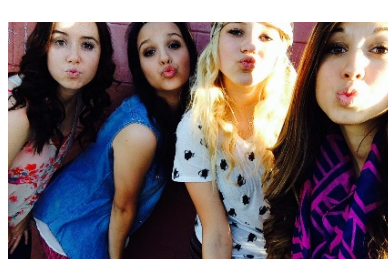
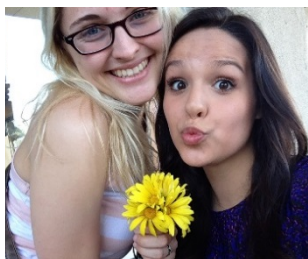
Being a girl can be a difficult task, but we have each other to help us make it through the day. This is my synopsis, my point of view on being a girl, with my girls.

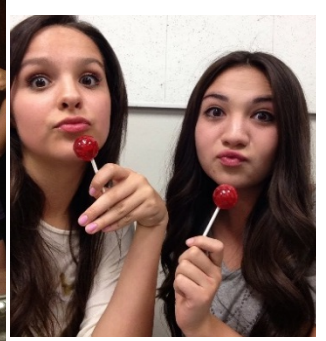
Viva



What It Means To Be A Girl Where *I* Live

Where I live, it is hot and in the summer, no girl wears pants. We live in sun dresses and sandals, in pinned up hair and we sweat off our makeup after walking outside for two minutes. Mesa, Arizona. That's where I, Viva Valdez, reside. My girlfriends and I live in a city that everyone labels as BORING because there is never anything to do, but as long as we're together, we don't have that problem. Just like any other community, we are surrounded by the rich, the poor, the middle class, the upper middle class, the drugs, the alcohol, the coffee shop, and the fast food hangout. Living in an upper middle class neighborhood does not mean we don't fall into the common teenage errors. We aren't rich, our families DO struggle with money (although some of us more than others), and we have all cried the same teenage tears as any other girl. In all honesty, every girl from every aspect of life faces the daily "teenage" trials: we lose friends, we drool over boys, we get annoyed of each other, we fight, we scream, and we all love ice cream. Well, life is usually great and all, but there are always hardships we have to face, and us girls have to stick together. My group of friends has done a pretty decent job of that. I do have one main girl group, however, we are all friends with different people, too, and we all get along when everyone decides to mix it up and everyone hangs out. There have been times, however, when we have had to face some serious issues and consequences. A few of my friends have started to dabble in the realm of drugs and alcohol, thinking that's the way to cope with internal issues. We have all taken turns with the long night phone calls, telling our friends that we are here, that we will listen, that what they are doing is dangerous and hurting us all. You know, people listen for a while, then they stop, then you help them again. and the cycle just repeats itself. Sometimes it hurts to know





There comes a point, however, when you have to learn to let go. When you go so far as to lie for a friend, and you take the fall, or you become their excuse to lie to their parents, enough is enough. I remember a time when this happened, and I blamed myself. Was I not a good enough friend? Was I not saying the right things? No, this had nothing to do with me, and that's when it clicked. THIS is what it means to be a girl, to be a girlfriend, to be strong for yourself and strong for others, to let go when it's time, to push forward when you have to. The friend that used me as her excuse also used to be one of my best friends, and we have really drifted within the past year or so. I guess that happens as we all grow up. Thank goodness, however, that the girls I surround myself with are always there for me to talk to, to yell at and cry with when we have problems, who are willing to talk things out with me when no one else can. Thank goodness I can third wheel with my friends and their boyfriends and it's not awkward. Who else has a friend that brings you gelato when you're sad and brings you a new and exciting flavor because she knows how much you hate chocolate? Well, those are my friends. They come to every single performance of mine, they support my dreams, we help each other with homework and bring each other *surprise* chai lattes and babysit siblings with each other. We are honest with each other and aren't afraid to tell each other how we feel. Now, THAT is important. Girls can be vicious, rude, selfish, conceited, and insecure, however, it is up to all of us to help one another out. Girls need to connect with each other in order to thrive. My singer, my actor, my palm reader, my future business major, my tree hugger, my soccer player, my therapist, my donut-lover, my basketball player: they are the ones who are by my side. I am so thankful I have found those connections, and I am amazed at the women we are becoming.

These are my girls from Mesa, AZ

They're the ones who are important to me.

